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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: KOSOVO SECURITY FORCE POISED TO START
OPERATIONS JANUARY 21

Classified By: Ambassador Tina S. Kaidanow for Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: At 2400 on January 20 Kosovo will deactivate the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC) and will activate the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) at one minute past midnight on January 21. At the same time, approximately 2900 current KPC members will receive notification whether or not they will make the transition to the new KSF; 1411 will receive offers.

KPC members not selected for the KSF will continue receiving their KPC salaries until June 14 when the KPC, pursuant to the Ahtisaari Plan, formally ceases to exist. They will receive an additional year of severance pay starting on June

115. KFOR, in coordination with the Ministry for the Kosovo Security Force (MKSF) and KSF commander General Selimi, finished KSF senior officer selection on December 30 and identified the KSF's roster of generals and colonels for the new force. The KPC drew most of its personnel from the wartime Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and maintains strong support among public and political circles. The government is at pains to ensure that the transition does not shake the support of war veterans and others loyal to the KLA's legacy, and has as times attempted to intervene inappropriately in personnel matters. Despite this challenge, we will work with Minister for the KSF Mujota to ensure that both the KSF and MKSF are not dumping grounds for those chosen more for political loyalty than for ability. END SUMMARY

12. (C) Minister for the Kosovo Security Force Fehmi Mujota on January 15 reviewed with poloff upcoming steps in deactivating the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC) and activating the Kosovo Security Force (KSF). Milestones include:

-- January 19 - KPC members finish returning weapons, and KSF assumes control of logistics;

-- January 20 - KPC members receive official notification of whether or not they will join the KSF or begin focusing on resettlement;

-- January 20, midnight (24:00) - KPC deactivates;

-- January 21, 00:01 - KSF activates;

-- January 22 - new KSF members receive their new uniforms and insignia;

-- February 2 - 350 KPC members selected for the KSF begin training;

-- Early April (tentative) - first training class for new recruits.

13. (C) The KSF will start its operations with 1411 members, including 91 minorities (demographics not known), from the KPC according to MKSF data available on January 16, although these numbers change frequently. The unselected KPC members (approximately 1500) will continue to draw their KPC salaries until June 14, but will focus their activities solely on resettlement. Donors have contributed 13,000,000 euro to fund KPC standdown activities, including money for retraining. Other benefits include one year of severance pay at 100 percent of salary from June 2009 to June 2010 and a generous pension plan--70% of current salary--for KPC members over the age of 50. As an additional benefit, the government, responding to pressure from pro-KLA political figures, is reviewing a plan that would award veterans benefits--for example, hiring preferences and some free government services--for KPC members not selected for the KSF. (NOTE: The Cabinet has not yet approved this plan, but we expect that Minister Mujota will announce the final details of the measure during a January 21 press conference. END NOTE)

14. (C) KFOR completed the selection board for senior officers on December 30. On December 19 President Sejdiu, following KFOR's evaluation, appointed General Sylejman Selimi as the KSF's commander (COMKSF). The senior officer selection board

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identified Major General Rrahman Rama to serve as Deputy KSF and Land Forces Commander. The board also identified six additional general officer appointments. One general officer's slot remains open and is being reserved for an ethnic minority. (NOTE: The KSF is considering appointing a Serb from the Kosovo Police to this open position. At this point, the position is being held for a minority, without further definition, but there is interest in filling the slot with a Serb. END NOTE) The senior selection board also identified 15 Colonels, including one minority, a Bosniak. These senior officers all come from within current KPC ranks, and they will receive new KSF uniforms prior to January 20. COMKSF will wear his new uniform at a joint press conference with Minister Mujota on January 21 to announce the KSF's activation. KFOR and the MKSF completed the remaining selection boards for junior officers and other ranks on January 14. (NOTE: New KSF uniforms are donated U.S. military uniforms in the process of being phased out and made available through the Excess Defense Articles (EDA) program. END NOTE.)

FINALIZING THE DETAILS

15. (C) With the timeline of critical milestones now in place for standing up the KSF, the Ministry for the KSF (MKSF) is scrambling to complete last minute details. This includes symbolic gestures like removing KPC symbols from decommissioned barracks and equipment and developing new signage for KSF bases. Orders are also in place to remove Albanian flags and pictures of famed KLA wartime leader Adem Jashari from KSF facilities. Additional logistical challenges entail ordering KSF license plates, procuring sufficient insignia for new KSF uniforms, and notifying personnel who will join the KSF. (Comment: We and others have urged the MKSF to establish a new identity for the KSF -- one that will represent an independent, multi-ethnic Kosovo, and not dwell on links to the KLA. End Comment)

16. (C) KFOR and the MKSF are at pains to ensure that a separation exists between the KPC and the KSF, since the KPC is a UN-created body with no connection to the Kosovo Government. Thus, KFOR is using differing mechanics to notify KPC members of their new status. KSF selectees will

receive a letter signed by Minister Mujota and COMKFOR Lt. Gen Gay. KPC members not selected for the KSF will receive their notification from COMKFOR and outgoing KPC Commander General Selimi. Following January 20, deactivated KPC members will address questions and complaints about their status solely to KFOR, which convened the selection boards for all ranks. The KSF and the MKSF will only deal with active duty KSF members.

CONTINUITY OF COVERAGE

17. (C) Minister Mujota expects that for a period of time following KSF activation that there will be some logistical dislocation and upheaval as new members take care of personal issues--including, in some cases, moving to new barracks in new municipalities. To ensure continuity of coverage, he is addressing a letter to COMKFOR requesting assistance from January 20 to February 2 in providing crisis response, explosive ordnance disposal (EOD), and civil protection. (This is a formal request motivated more by a desire for the appearance of smooth transition than real concern KSF will be unable to fulfill any critical responsibilities during this time period.)

NEW MINISTRY BUILDINGS

18. (C) The MKSF currently occupies cramped and temporary facilities with seating for no more than twenty staff. In February the MKSF will take over the vacated former KPC headquarters. This will provide space for the 60 KSF members assigned to start working at the MKSF, an integrated civilian and uniformed ministry.

COMMENT:

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19. (C) The MKSF has had a bumpy road over the past several weeks as delays in the appointment of General Selimi, who has a difficult relationship with PM Thaci, set back the activation timeline for the KSF. Both the KPC and the KLA continue to command great public support, and their veterans possess influential voices in Thaci's government. This influence led to an interruption in the senior officer selection board when pressure to include controversial KPC General Nuredin Lushtaku, who subsequently resigned, forced the board to suspend operations. (Lushtaku, a member of a politically significant family with close ties to Thaci, was the subject of numerous disciplinary infractions while in the KPC. We doubt that he could have survived a selection board, and we regarded his resignation as a positive development.) Minister Mujota told us that he responded to the political pressure to include Lushtaku by telling all that his resignation invalidated his eligibility for further consideration, and the board resumed without further incident. Mujota maintains that his obligations towards the KSF are well-defined in the law, and he uses these legal provisions--and the cover of KFOR--to fend off efforts to foist inappropriate personnel on the MKSF and the KSF. We expect that Mujota will receive further pressure to include former KPC members as civilian personnel within the MKSF as the ministry grows. Among internationals, Mujota, with his focus on his legal mandate and his smooth demeanor in front of the press, is earning a reputation as a skilled technocrat. We will continue to support him in these efforts.

KAIDANOW